



Making Health Care Affordable & Accessible for Kansans

As I travel the state the issue that people most want to talk about is health care. They want their elected leaders to do something to control costs and make affordable coverage available to small business owners and hard-working Kansans.

Right now, about 300,000 Kansans don't have any health insurance. More than 90 percent of them either work, or are members of working households.

Insurance Commissioner Sandy Praeger and I believe the time has come to address this crisis. So, setting aside our party differences, we worked together to write a health care reform initiative that will control runaway costs, streamline the health care system, and make health insurance and prescription drugs more affordable for thousands of children, working parents, and small businesses.

Our HealthyKansas initiative calls for a Cost Containment Commission to work with doctors and hospitals to eliminate burdensome paperwork and regulations. Streamlining the system will reduce the cost of administrative overhead, which now consumes about 30 percent of the \$12 billion that Kansans spend each year on health care.

Our initiative will also make health insurance more affordable for small businesses, which employ about two-thirds of uninsured Kansans. We intend to subsidize a new, private insurance plan that small business owners will be able to afford.

In addition, we will provide coverage to more than 40,000 children and 30,000 low-wage, working parents through the state's HealthWave insurance program.

By making insurance more affordable to small businesses and covering more children and working adults, we can significantly reduce the ranks of the uninsured and \$320 million in unpaid bills that Kansas hospitals reported last year. That will help reduce health care costs for everyone.

Commissioner Praeger and I believe a responsible way to pay for the initiative is by imposing a 50 cent-per-pack health care assessment on cigarettes and a 5 percent assessment on tobacco products.

Smoking is responsible for more than \$720 million a year in health care costs and it's been shown that raising the price of cigarettes is the best way to keep kids from starting.

Even so, the current excise tax on cigarettes has proven to be one of the state's most reliable sources of revenue.

Look for more information about our plan to help Kansans obtain low-cost prescription drugs in future columns. Until then, you can learn more about the health care reform initiative, by visiting my Web site at www.ks governor.org, or Commissioner Praeger's at www.ks insurance.org